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A philosophical examination of character education  
with special reference to a debate about character  
between situationism and virtue ethics

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## **Abstract**

The researcher into character education faces two interlocking conceptual questions: the definition of character, and the definition of character education. The current debate about character provides a vantage point from which a dialectic between two conceptions of character respectively proposed by situationism and virtue ethics is critically scrutinised, and a conceptually profound, as well as empirically more adequate, notion of character is determined from it, which gives consideration both to the complex and multifaceted dimensions of character, and the actual prevalence of local traits.

A fresh insight into the inculcation of virtues is thus derived, specifically via the idea of converting local virtues into more global ones. Local virtues serve as an unavoidable relay station in the time-consuming educational process between lack of virtue and full virtue. The more global the acquired local virtues become, the more virtuous one is.

Given that the individualisation of moral character necessarily accompanies the inculcation of virtues, this more personal aspect of character development, and its corollary of the varieties of moral personality, enable us to have a proper expectation of the goal of character education. The influence exerted by temperament on the inculcation of virtues indicates that not all virtues are equally available to each of us, and the situationalluck of moral upbringing highlights the limitation of one's agency over character. The correct recognition of the effects of different kinds of moral luck on the inculcation of virtues enables us to adopt a sound attitude by which to confront our responsibility for character.

Finally, a localist account of character is proposed to provide an appropriate language in which character trait attributions and evaluations can be made. The thesis concludes by highlighting the importance of conducting a constructive dialogue between ethics and psychology in the interest of character education.